Question

If a servant has a love for what is good, right and praiseworthy in itself

Ibn Taymiyyah

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مسألة: فيما إذا كان في العبد محبة لما هو خير وحق ومحمود في نفسه

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Translator’s introduction

All praise is due to Allah; we praise Him and seek His forgiveness.

We seek refuge in Allah from the evils of our souls and the wickedness of our deeds.

He, whom Allah guides, none can misguide him, and he whom He misguides, none can guide him.

I bear witness that there is no god but Allah, alone, without partner.

His is the dominion and His is the praise.

He gives life and causes death, and He is over all things competent. Now then:

I have translated the book before you, entitled (**Question: If a servant has a love for what is good, right, and praiseworthy in itself**) by (**Ibn Taymiyya**) because of the many benefits and advantages it contains for the Muslim.

This translation is my own effort. If I do well, it is from Allah and His guidance to me, and if I make a mistake, it is from myself and from Satan.

I ask Allah to make this work of mine purely for Him and to spread the word of truth throughout the entire earth and to teach Muslims who do not speak Arabic their religion that Allah has chosen for them.

The one in need of his Lord’s forgiveness: **Omar bin Ahmed Tohamy**.

Chapter: If the servant has a love for what is good, right, and praiseworthy in itself

If a servant has a love for what is good, right, and praiseworthy in itself, then he does it out of love for itself, not for Allah, nor for any other partner, such as loving kindness to those in need, loving forgiveness for those who commit crimes, loving knowledge, learning, and understanding the truth, loving honesty, keeping promises, fulfilling trusts, and maintaining kinship ties. This is common and prevalent among people in their pre-Islamic and Islamic periods, in terms of the intellectual and practical strength of the soul. Most seekers of knowledge seek it out of love. This is why Abu Dawood said to Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal: **Did you seek this knowledge—or he said: Did you gather it for Allah? He said: Allah is powerful, but it was made beloved to me, so I did it.** This is the state of most souls. Allah has created in them a love for knowledge, science, and the perception of truths. He may create in them a love for truthfulness, justice, and keeping promises. He may create in them a love for benevolence and mercy for people. He does these things not to get close to anyone among creation, nor does he seek anyone's praise or fear their blame, but rather because these perceptions and movements are enjoyed and delight the living being, and he finds joy and happiness in them, just as he takes pleasure in merely hearing beautiful sounds, merely seeing cheerful things, and merely smelling a pleasant scent.

Likewise, he takes pleasure and delight in knowing himself through the things known inwardly. He also takes pleasure in witnessing his inner self and his feelings, just as he takes pleasure in witnessing his outward self and his feelings. He also takes pleasure in the universal matters that his soul comprehends, and in his actions and movements, just as he takes pleasure in his eating, drinking, and sexual intercourse, and just as he takes pleasure in his mercy and kindness to those in need, whether relatives or non-relatives. He takes pleasure in generosity and giving, and takes pleasure in forgiving those who wrong him and refraining from punishing the wrongdoer, as is reported of Al-Ma'mun, who said: **"Forgiveness has become so beloved to me that I fear that I will not be rewarded for it."** These are the noble moral qualities found in the children of Adam, just as they were found in the Bedouins. This sense and this voluntary movement are enjoyed by the living, benefited from, and enjoyed in the present moment. It cannot be said that he did this without a purpose, nor to bring benefit or ward off harm. Rather, it brings benefit and ward off harm to himself, just as in the soul of the eater and drinker; he brings the benefit of satiety and ward off the harm of hunger. Thus, all these things ward off harm from him and bring pleasure to him.

That is why it is said, "My soul is healed," and "My chest is cured." He finds healing in his chest, just as he finds healing in his body through the disappearance of illness and attainment of well-being.

These are matters that are perceived inwardly and outwardly, and whose beauty has been recognized by those who say that mind judges things to be ugly or beautiful, and by those who say that knowledge of their beauty is due to an inherent, intelligible quality, either intuitively, through contemplation, or through knowledge of the Shari'ah.

He was right in his statement that their beauty and ugliness are due to a meaning inherent in them, and he was right that this may be perceived by mind or by the Shari'ah.

The first was mistaken in denying that this is due to the benefit it brings to the servant and the prevention of harm in itself, even if this also occurs in the Hereafter, for that is a tangible matter.

The second was mistaken in believing that this is not due to a characteristic of the action, and that goodness and ugliness are merely the addition of the action to the command and prohibition. He was somewhat correct in considering this as a matter of suitability for nature and inconsistency from it, and a matter of the perfection and imperfection of the one characterized by that. However, he was mistaken in his assumption that rational goodness and ugliness derive from that, and he was not entirely mistaken. For goodness and ugliness—that which is perceived by the senses, mind, and the Shari'ah, by sight, contemplation, and experience, by the well-known outward and inward, by rational reasoning, and by the Shari'ah command—are essentially of the same kind. Each is known by that, and by that which is not known by the other, and by that which is proven.

The Three Paths of Knowledge

These three paths: hearing, sight, and mind, are the paths of knowledge:

1-Sight:

Sight -which is the visible, both inward and outward- perceives the compatibility and discord, the immediate benefit and harm, in these movements and intentions.

2-Hearing:

Hearing -which is Allah's revelation- tells us what witnesses fail to perceive, regarding the benefits and harms of that in the Hereafter.

The perfection of religion is through innate nature and its appreciation, not through its transformation and alteration. Every child is born in a state of innate nature, and Allah created His servants as monotheists, but the devils deceived them and forbade them what Allah had permitted them, commanding them to associate with Him that for which He had not sent down any authority. This is what Allah has informed us of in what His Messenger narrated from Him in the authentic hadith narrated by Muslim. By their innate nature, they love Allah alone and love to consume whatever good things they need. Love follows witnessing and feeling. This innate sense of feeling and movement, which leads to the worship of their Creator, through the good provisions He provides, is the face of goodness established by good deeds: both those commanded and those permitted. All of this is good, because of the appropriate harmony and love with which they were created. Whatever is witnessed in the world of testimony is perceived through witnessing and feeling, and whatever is unseen is perceived through the hearing brought by the Messengers.

3-The Mind (The Heart):

The heart comprehends this witnessed and heard thing. It must comprehend what Allah has commanded and informed us, just as it must comprehend what we have witnessed and sensed. Thus, it comprehends the testimony and the unseen, meaning controling knowledge, and this occurs in a comprehensive and established manner within the soul. But their claim that mind perceives the good and bad of an action in a way that is compatible is false, just as their claim that the Shari'ah brings about good or bad in a way that is not compatible is false. Those people only denied this because they wanted to establish for Allah the same kind of thing they perceived in humans, and they denied compatibility and discord in His case. These people wanted to establish a pure Shari'ah based on pure will, in which there is neither compatibility

nor discord. Both groups denied the reality of Allah's love and approval of good actions and His hatred of those who commit them wrongfully. This is the meaning they express in our case: compatibility and discord. They did so because of their negation of Allah attributes[1]. Therefore, while these people denied these attributes, they also denied predestination, which is the universality of His power, will, and creation. These people denied the appropriateness and merits contained in the Shari'ah, which are contained in commands and prohibitions. They also denied the wisdom and mercy contained in His creation and will. These people affirmed power, will, and creation, but fell short in affirming mercy, wisdom, and justice. Those people affirmed some wisdom and justice, but also fell short in that, despite their shortcomings in power, will, and creation. This is despite the fact that neither group denies the commands and prohibitions of the Shari'ah.

However, the extremists of those people used their minds to reject many of the commands and prohibitions contained in the Shari'ah, saying, "This contradicts rational wisdom," as Satan and his followers did. The extremists of those people also rejected the commands and prohibitions, saying, "If the Most Merciful had willed, we would not have worshipped them," as the polytheists said. Satan was more blatant in his disbelief, and for this reason, their innovations were closer to the Sunnah and Jama'ah.

These things that souls and hearts naturally love are good, and those they hate are evil. For knowledge is a feeling coupled with love, while denial is a feeling coupled with hatred. As for that which is not felt in any way, it is neither known nor denied, and that which is neither loved nor hated in any way is neither known nor denied. If a man is told a hadith and denies it out of ignorance, then he has denied something his hearing dislikes. Likewise, the rejected hadith, according to the people of hadith, is that which they have not heard and love because of its authenticity and truthfulness, but when they hear it, they reject it after realizing it. The point here is that loving these good things is not reprehensible, but rather praiseworthy. Whoever does these things for this love is neither reprehensible nor punished. Nor can it be said that their actions are for someone other than Allah, for they would be like a hypocrite or a polytheist. That is reprehensible polytheism. As for the one who does it simply out of innate love, he is not a polytheist, nor is he seeking to draw closer to Allah through it, so that he deserves the reward of someone who works for Allah and His servant. Rather, He may reward him for it with various types of reward: either by increasing it in its equivalent, so that he enjoys it in this world. For this reason, the unbeliever is rewarded for his good deeds in this world, even if he does not draw closer to Allah through them. If every good deed not done for Allah were reprehensible and deserving of punishment, the unbeliever would not be fed for his good

[1] The Jahmites, or Mu'attilah, are a scholastic theological group affiliated with Islam. They are one of the extremist Murji'ah groups that emerged in response to the Kharijites, who considered sinners to be unbelievers. They emerged at the hands of their founder, Jahm ibn Safwan al-Tirmidhi, they negated Allah attributes.

deeds in this world, since they would be sins and not good deeds. And if he might enjoy them in this world and be fed with them in this world, then one of the benefits, results, and rewards of these good deeds in this world is that Allah guides him to draw closer to Him through them, so that he will receive the greatest reward for them in the Hereafter. This is the meaning of the statement of one of the Salaf[2]: **"We sought knowledge for other than Allah, and He refused to do it except for Allah."** Another said, when it was said to him: **"They seek hadith without any intention,"** he said: **"Their seeking has an intention,"** meaning that their seeking itself is good and benefits them. This is said about knowledge because of its specificity, because knowledge is the guiding proof. If one seeks it with love and acquires it, it will reveal one's sincerity to Allah and working for Him.

This is why some say: It stems from the first contemplation, which is the introduction to knowledge. Intention is conditional upon knowing the intended goal. If one does not yet know it, how can one draw near to it? If one looks with love or otherwise and knows the object of worship, it is then valid to worship and seek it. Similarly, sincerity: how can one be sincere if one does not know sincerity? If seeking the knowledge of sincerity could only be achieved through sincerity, then a cycle would be necessary. Knowledge precedes intention and will, whether through sincerity or otherwise. Will and intention cannot occur until knowledge is attained.

Based on this, what Imam Ahmad mentioned about himself is good and represents the state of praiseworthy souls whose condition is upright. This is similar to what Khadija (may Allah be pleased with her) said to the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him): **"You maintain kinship ties, speak truthfully, welcome guests, bear burdens, support the needy, and assist in times of need."** He did these things out of love for them, as he was created and innately inclined to do them. So we knew that souls that are naturally inclined to love and do praiseworthy things will not be led by Allah to do the opposite of blameworthy things. **When he said to her: I feared for myself, she said: No, by Allah, Allah will never disgrace you[3].** The hadith is in the two Sahihs.

People have disputed over prophecy: Is it merely Allah informing His servant, or does it refers to his attributes of perfection? They also disputed over prophecy: Is it merely a matter of the speech of the Lawgiver, or is it related to the characteristics that distinguish him, and does it require a divine speech or notification? That is why prophecy has parts, as the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) said: **“Good guidance, good conduct, and moderation are a part of twenty-five parts of prophecy.”** - Narrated by the People of the Sunnah. This is about action.

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[2] The term "salaf" (predecessors) in the language means fathers or grandfathers. The term "righteous predecessors" (al-salaf al-salih) refers to the early Muslims, including the Companions, the Followers, and those who followed them, as they are considered role models.

[3] Part of the hadith mentioned before

He said about knowledge: **“A good dream is a part of forty-six parts of prophecy.”** He said: **Three of the morals of the Messengers**...[4]

This love and feeling that Allah created in souls is the origin of all good and evil, all praise and blame. Were it not for the feeling that counts for loving a beloved and hating a hated one, there would be no voluntary movement that moves any animal by choice. And there would be no command and prohibition, reward and punishment. Reward is what souls love and enjoy, while punishment is what souls hate and suffer. This only comes after feeling. Feeling, love and hatred are the origin of all living things in this world and the hereafter. Through them, commands and prohibitions, promises and threats are made beautiful. And that command and prohibition, and promise and threat, is a completion of the innate nature, and each of them is an aid to the other. So the Shari’ah is a completion of the natural innate nature, and the natural innate nature is a principle and an aid to belief in the Shari’ah and acting upon it. The servant is he who follows the religion that reforms him, so he will be among the people of righteous [deeds] in the Hereafter. The wretched one is he who does not follow the religion and do the work that the Shari’ah brought. So this is this, and Allah knows best.

[4] Hadith in which prophet said:” Three of the morals of the Messengers: hastening to break the fast, delaying the pre-dawn meal, and using the siwak.”